A HEART ATTUNED TO MERCY

THE INTERCESSION OF MARY AND OF FÂTIMA

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The Catholic Catechism suggests that intercession – asking on behalf of another – is "characteristic of a heart attuned to God's mercy", since "in intercession, he who prays looks not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others, even to the point of praying for those who do him harm."[1]

The Christian body is itself theologically divided over the question of intercession: while few Christians would deny the possibility of one person praying for another, not all would accept the concept of the 'communion of the saints', with the concomitant possibility that Mary, the angels and the saints pray for the Church on earth: this, despite the historic Christian practice of asking the saints for their prayers. Even fewer would be theologically comfortable with the idea of believers on earth making intercession for those who have died.

There is no shortage of biblical verses to underscore the most important strands in this theology. Primarily, we are reminded that Jesus Christ alone is the Mediator between God and humanity. For "there is one God," Paul reminds Timothy, "and there is one mediator between God and people, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2: 5).[2] He is the High Priest, says the Letter to the Hebrews, who "lives forever to make intercession" for those who draw near to God through him (Hebrews 7: 25).

Nevertheless, it seems clear that the saints and the Church on earth in some way participate in or share this intercessory prerogative. While the Book of Revelation speaks more than once about the prayers of the saints, Paul regularly urges his listeners to make intercessory prayer a part of their spiritual regime and discipline. "First of all

[1] The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Doubleday, New York 1995, n. 2635.

[2] The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1995, n. 2634.

then," he writes to Timothy, "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2: 1-4). Furthermore, he counsels his listeners to "strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf" (Romans 15: 30). Not Paul alone: James urges his readers to "confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed: this, holds James, because "the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5: 16).

Intercessory prayer is thoroughly established in the Old Testament – the mediation of Abraham and Moses is well known, and the prophet Samuel regards it as a sin *not* to intercede for his people (1 Samuel 12: 23). Samuel also raises the possibility of God Himself mediating for someone who has sinned against another human being (1 Samuel 2: 25), an idea hinted at in the Qur'ân. Paul regularly and unashamedly asks the prayers of his New Testament listeners (2 Corinthians 1: 11, Philippians 1: 19) and reminds them of his unceasing prayers for them (1 Thessalonians 1: 2, Colossians 1: 3, 9, Philippians 1: 3-5, 2 Timothy 1: 3, Philemon 1: 4-6). Additional New Testament passages commend praying for others – the elders of the Church over the sick (James 5: 14), and a Christian for a fellow Christian who is witnessed committing a sin (unless it be a sin that 'leads to death', in which case more than human intercession is needed – 1 John 5: 16). Jesus himself invites his followers to make intercessory prayer for all who make their lives difficult.

The question of intercession by Mary and the saints is less clearly established in the Scriptural texts, although it is implicitly present. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that already after her Son's ascension, Mary was assisting the Church at its very beginnings with her prayers. Taken up to heaven, Mary's "manifold intercession" continues to bring gifts of eternal salvation to the faithful on earth, so that she is rightly invoked as Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix.[1]

As to the intercession of the saints, the Catechism reads: "Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness...they do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they

[1] The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1995, nn. 965, 965. Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 62, 69 in FLANNERY A. (ed.)., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Dominican Publications, Dublin 1975.

acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus...so by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped."[1]

For Shîᶜî Muslims, the culmination of Fâtima's[2] high standing with God and the reward for all her weakness, her tears and the suffering she bore, is her extraordinary intercessory power before God on the Day of Resurrection. This paper seeks to weigh up the possibility and prospects of intercession in Islam, and then present some of the texts which highlight the prerogatives of Fâtima in this regard. It also seeks, in this Year of Mercy, to invite some comparisons with the specifically Catholic doctrine of the intercessory prerogatives of Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

The belief that there are precise intercessors who, on the Day of Resurrection and specifically with God's permission, can make intercession for the faithful, is a central principle of Shîᶜî Islamic theology and piety.[3] Nonetheless, it remains a highly disputed and debated question within Islam in general: for while the Shîᶜa, and some groups within the Sunnî uphold not merely the *possibility* but also the *reality* of intercession, others disallow it, insisting that those who believe in it negate their Islam.[4] His subject has been clearly dealt with by John Bowker and Michael Fitzgerald: what follows is a summary of their findings.[5]

«*Ask forgiveness for them (O Muhammad) or ask not forgiveness for them; though thou ask forgiveness for them seventy times Allah will not forgive them. This is because they disbelieved in Allah and His messenger, and Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk*» (Q. 9: 80). Ostensibly, the Qur'ân rebuffs any prospect that intercession can help wrong-doers. In reality, the issue is more ambiguous than this. Certainly, the dismissal of intercession occurs more than once, as in, for example Q. 40: 18, Q. 6: 51, 70. As Bowker notes, there is a twofold argumentation in the text: the first refutes any false security that the wickedness one has done could somehow be annulled on Judgment Day (Q. 2: 48, 123): the second warns that there exist no beings on such equal terms with God that they can convince him to

[1] The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1995, n. 956. Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 49 in FLANNERY A. (ed.)., *Vatican Council II*, 1975.

[2] Only child of Muhammad to survive him, wife of ᶜAlî and mother of al-Hasan and al-Husayn, she is a key figure within Shîᶜî Islamic theology and piety, where she is venerated as virgin and mother, intercessor and a central member of the 'people of the house', one of the poles around which Shîᶜî belief revolves.

[3] SHAH-KAZEMI R. (trans.)., Doctrines of Shi'i Islam. A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices, 2001: 132.

[4] So say, for example, the Salafiyya, a reform movement started in Egypt by Muhammad ᶜAbduh (1849-1905). Cf. al-QAHTÂNÎ M. S., al-Walâ' wa-l-Barâ', al-Firdous Ltd., London 1993: 99.

[5] Cf. BOWKER J., "Intercession in the Quran and the Jewish Tradition" in *Journal of Semitic Studies* XI (1966): 69-70 and FITZGERALD M.L., "Mediation in Islam" in *Studia Missionalia*, vol. XXI, 1972: 185 – 206.

change His mind or one of His just decisions, principally in terms of *shirk* (Q. 6: 94, Q. 10: 18, Q. 30: 13, Q. 36: 23).[1]

Nonetheless, there remain Qur'anic passages that suggest the opposite: that not only do intercessors exist, but that intercession is a possibility: Q. 4: 85 (where Pickthall renders the tradition verb for 'intercede' – *shafaᶜa* – as 'intervene'), Q. 2: 255, Q. 10: 3, Q. 20: 109 and Q. 34: 23 (all of which introduce the concept on intercession by God's permission)[2] and Q. 39: 43-44 (introducing the idea that all intercession belongs to God alone). Alternatively, Q. 43: 86 suggests that only those who knowingly bear witness to the truth have any intercessory power. In terms of groups of intercessors, the angels can intercede, but only with the requisite Divine permission (Q. 53: 26, Q. 21: 28). It is hard to discern who precisely has received God's permission to intercede: Q. 43: 86 has suggested only those who knowingly bear witness to the truth, while Q. 19: 87 posits only the one who has made a covenant with God. Bowker wonders if this is one person or more than one, and if this could perhaps be a reference to Ibrâhîm.[3]

The thrust of Bowker's argument is, as he notes, that "it is possible, therefore, that these passages mean no more than that intercession is allowed for those who are already acceptable before God, but who have offended in some minor way" (Q. 40: 7).[4] The Arabic is not always entirely clear as to whether God allows intercession **for** (in the sense of 'on behalf of') whomever He permits it or **to** whomever He permits. Q. 34: 23 seems to be the former. What is clear is that intercession is of no benefit for those who are categorized as evil because of their works (Q. 7: 53, Q. 26: 100, Q. 74: 48) – those, for example, who reject God and His messenger (Q. 9: 84) – not even Muhammad's intercession will be of any use for these. What seems clear is that despite those passages that appear to rule it out entirely, some prospect of intercession is permitted, albeit controlled and limited.

A curious Qur'anic exception to this appears to be the intriguing figure of Ibrâhîm. The text knows of two traditions of Ibrâhîm interceding, both of them well known in Judaism. Q. 11: 74 alludes to the famous story of his intercession for Sodom, using the 3RD form verb *ğâdala-yuğâdilu*, meaning 'to wrangle' or 'argue' – specifically, to 'argue on behalf of' in the sense of being an advocate for someone – cf. Q. 40: 4-5 and particularly Q. 4: 107, where Pickthall renders it as 'plead'. In Q. 11: 76 Ibrâhîm is informed that his intercession will not avail the people of Lot, for God's command has already gone forth, and the threatened doom cannot be stopped. The Qur'ân also

[1] BOWKER J., "Intercession in the Quran" (1966): 69-70.

[2] BOWKER J., "Intercession in the Quran" (1966): 71.

[3] Ibid.

[4] BOWKER J., "Intercession in the Quran" (1966): 72.

alludes to Ibrâhîm's intercession for his idolatrous father: in Q. 9: 47-8 he assures his father not only of his prayers for him but also of God's graciousness to him (Ibrâhîm), which has not left him without blessing.

But Q. 9: 113 is less positive: «*It is not for the Prophet, and those who believe, to pray for the forgiveness of idolaters even though they may be near of kin (to them) after it hath become clear that they are people of hell-fire*». The following verse makes clear that Ibrâhîm's prayer his father is made only because of a promise he made, and that discovering that his father is an enemy to God, Ibrâhîm separates from him. In Q. 60: 4 this is clearly underscored: «*There is a goodly pattern for you Abraham and those with him, when they told their folk; Lo! we are guiltless of you and all that ye worship beside Allah. We have done with you. And there hath arisen between us and you hostility and hate for ever until ye believe in Allah only save that which Abraham promised his father (when he said): I will ask forgiveness for thee, though I own nothing for thee from Allah Our Lord*».

The Qur'ân mentions prayers that Ibrâhîm prayed (such as Q. 14: 41 «*Our Lord! Forgive me and my parents and believers on the day when the account is cast*» and Q. 26: 86 «*And forgive my father. Lo! he is of those who err*». But as Bowker notes, "in two places a passage about Abraham is preceded or followed by a statement that intercession is unavailing" (Q. 26: 100, following a story and Q. 2: 123 preceding one).[1]

Therefore, at the level of the Qur'anic text, the issue of intercession (*shafâ^{c}a*) is taken up in a general manner on three levels. There are, to begin with, texts which ostensibly repudiate the possibility of intercession. These include, for example, Q. 2: 123 («*And guard [yourselves] against a day when no soul will in aught avail another, nor will compensation be accepted from it, nor will intercession be of use to it; nor will they be helped*») and Q. 6: 70 («*And forsake those who take their religion for a pastime and a jest, and whom the life of the world beguileth. Remind [mankind] hereby lest a soul be destroyed by what it earneth. It hath beside Allah no protecting ally nor intercessor, and though it offer every compensation it will not be accepted from it*»).

But on a second level, there are the verses which strongly contend that intercession is indeed possible, but that it remains wholly the prerogative of God, who alone has the ability to intercede. These verses include Q. 39: 43-44 («*Or choose they intercessors other than Allah? Say: What! Even though they have power over nothing and have no intelligence? Say: unto Allah belongeth all intercession*»).

Finally, there are those verses which appear to combine the first two classifications and give a more holistic picture of intercession in Islam. These propose that while

[1] Cf. BOWKER J., "Intercession in the Quran" (1966): 74.

intercession does indeed belong properly to God alone, God may, should He wish it, extend the possibility of intercession to others. These verses include Q. 10: 3 («*There is no intercessor [with Him] save after His permission*») and Q. 34: 23 («*No intercession availeth with Him save for him whom He permitteth*»). Further examples include Q. 2: 255, Q. 19: 87, Q. 20: 109 and Q. 21: 28.

Accordingly, there are ostensibly certain chosen ones – such as the prophets, the Imams (*a'imma*), the holy ones (*awliyâ'*) and even the angels – who could receive permission from God, and would then be able, by reason of their standing with God and, more crucially, the Divine acquiescence, to assist people with their prayers. Without this Divine consent, no intercession would be possible or accepted. It is notable that even in the course of their earthly lives, God's prophets had the capacity to intercede on behalf of those who, by their repentance, sought forgiveness and a return to the path of God. This is attested to by Qur'anic verses such as Q. 4: 64, in reference to Muhammad («*We sent no messenger save that he should be obeyed by Allah's leave. And if, when they had wronged themselves, they had but come unto thee and asked forgiveness of Allah, and asked forgiveness of the messenger, they would have found Allah Forgiving, Merciful*») and Q. 12: 97-98, in reference to Yaᶜqûb («*They said, O our father! Ask forgiveness of our sins for us, for lo! we were sinful. He said: I shall ask forgiveness for you of my Lord. Lo! He is the Forgiving, the Merciful*»).

At the level of the Qur'anic text then, there are specifically <u>eight</u> features we could underscore concerning intercession. The <u>first</u> is that it is, ostensibly, *an impossibility*. The Children of Israel (Q. 2: 48) and the general mass of believers (Q. 2: 254) are warned to stand ready for this day when no intercession will be accepted. The idolaters especially are warned that the Day of Judgment is a day on which no intercession will be accepted, and especially from those whom the idolaters mistakenly set up as intercessors. On that day, «*the mediation of no mediators will avail them*» (cf. Q. 10: 18, Q. 74: 48). The <u>second</u> feature is that intercession is established, categorically and in absolute terms, as belonging to God alone (cf. Q. 39: 43-44, cited above). The <u>third</u> feature is the opening of the possibility that intercession could permitted for others than God, but only by His permission: so, for example, Q. 2: 255 («*Who is he that intercedeth with Him save by His leave*?»), as well as Q. 10: 3, Q. 19: 87, Q. 21: 28 and Q. 43: 86.

A <u>fourth</u> feature of the Qur'ân is the suggestion that intercession, but only on behalf of those for whom God wills it (and these are among the believers) is permitted for the angels. So, for example, Q. 40: 7 («*Those who bear the Throne, and all who are round about it, hymn the praises of their Lord and believe in Him and ask forgiveness for those who believe [saying]: Our Lord! Thou comprehendest all things in mercy and knowledge, therefor forgive those*

who repent and follow Thy way. Ward off from them the punishment of hell») and Q. 42: 5 («*Almost might the heavens be rent asunder while the angels hymn the praise of their Lord and ask forgiveness for those on earth*») – notable in this latter verse is the absence of any delineation that it is for believers alone that the angels pray.

A fifth feature of intercession is that it is overtly and recurrently attributed to Muhammad in his lifetime, not only by his prayers but also by his presence (such as Q. 8: 33): so, for example, Q. 47: 19 («*So know [O Muhammad] that there is no God save Allah, and ask forgiveness for thy sin and for believing men and believing women*»). This intercession appears to be only for believers (highlighted, for example, by Q. 4: 107 and Q. 9: 113) – in fact, his intercession for the non-believers will be of no use to them (Q. 9: 80, 84 and Q. 63: 5-6 – «*whether thou ask forgiveness for them or ask not forgiveness for them is all one for them; Allah will not forgive them*»). See also Q. 3: 159, Q. 4: 64, 106-107, Q. 9: 103, Q. 24: 62 and Q. 60: 12.

A sixth feature is that intercession is suggested with reference to Muhammad and his distinctive position in the afterlife: the intercession and mediation of Muhammad on the Day of Judgment has been established by the consensus of scholars (*ijmâ*ᶜ), based upon the Qur'anic text and the books of *hadîth*, and is an article of belief in Islam (although rejected by the Muᶜtazila, who held that the person who enters the Fire will remain there forever). The specific reference to Muhammad's station in the afterlife is found in Q. 17: 70 («*It may be that thy Lord will raise thee to a praised estate*»). A number of the texts of Sunnî *hadîth*, such as al-Bukhârî and Muslim, link this 'praised estate' with Muhammad's prerogatives of intercession in Paradise.[1]

The seventh feature is the prospect of intercession by the prophets, based as always on the possibility of Divine permission, and in particular because the prophets made a covenant with their Lord (Q. 33: 7, 3: 81) and knowingly bore witness to the truth. A number of Qur'anic verses uphold the prophets' intercession during their lifetime: for example, the intercession of Ibrâhîm, seen already and recorded in Q. 60: 4 and in Q. 19: 47 («*Abraham promised his father: I will ask forgiveness for thee, though I own nothing for thee from Allah – our Lord*»), of Yaᶜqûb (Q. 12: 97-98 cited above).

The eighth feature concerns verses that deal with the believers' intercession in their lifetime: so, for example, in Q. 59: 10 («*And those who came (into the faith) after them say: Our Lord! forgive us and our brethren who were before us in the faith*»).

[1] Al-Bukhârî., *Sahîh*, vol. II, Book 24 (*Kitâb al-zakât*), bb. 51, n. 553: 321-322, Muslim., *Sahîh*, vol. I, Book 1 (*Kitâb al-îmân*), bb. 84, n. 320: 179-180.

Within the books of *hadîth*, Muhammad speaks of his own intercession: a few examples from the books of Sunnî *hadîth* will suffice. These texts establish clearly that God will bring out of the Fire those whom He wishes, whose sins have placed them there provisionally, and that He will do this by intercession.[1] The agent of this intercession is named (primarily) as Muhammad, whose intercession the transmitters link with his 'praised estate' (so-named in the Qur'ân).[2]

Seven basic strands found in the Books of Sunnî *hadîth* underscore the issue of Muhammad's own intercession.

The first, transmitted for example by al-Bukhârî, al-Nasâ'î, Ibn Mâja and al-Tirmidhî is that, according to Muhammad, it is indeed intercession that is meant by his 'praised estate' (Q. 17: 79).[3]

The second strand, carried for example by al-Bukhârî, Abû Dâwûd, Ibn Mâja and al-Tirmidhî is that people will be brought of the Fire and into Paradise by Muhammad's intercession.[4]

The third strand, conveyed for example by Abû Dâwûd, Ibn Mâja and al-Tirmidhî, is that Muhammad makes intercession specifically for members of his community who have committed serious sin,[5] although Ibn Mâja carries a *hadîth* that says Muhammad's intercession will be for every Muslim.[6]

The fourth, transmitted by, amongst others, al-Bukhârî and al-Tirmidhî, is that each prophet has been given a special prayer, and that Muhammad is reserving his prayer to be intercession for his followers on the Day of Resurrection.[7] There are other strands of

[1]Al-Bukhârî., *Sahîh*, vol. VIII, Book 78 (*Kitâb al-riqâq*), bb. 51, n. 563: 367, Muslim., *Sahîh*, vol. I, Book 1 (*Kitâb al-îmân*), bb. 83, n. 306: 172-173, vol. I, Book 1 (*Kitâb al-îmân*), bb. 84, n. 318: 178.

[2]Al-Bukhârî., *Sahîh*, vol. II, Book 24 (*Kitâb al-zakât*), bb. 51, n. 553: 321-322, Muslim., *Sahîh*, vol. I, Book 1 (*Kitâb al-îmân*), bb. 84, n. 320: 179-180. Cf. Q. 17: 79.

[3]Al-Bukhârî., *Sahîh*, *Kitâb al-zakât*, ch. 52, n. 1475: 323, *Kitâb al-tafsîr*, ch. 11, n. 4718: 193, *Kitâb al-tawhîd*, ch. 19, n. 7440: 325-8, al-Nasâ'î., *Sunan*, *Kitâb al-adhân*, ch. 38, n. 681: 400-1, Ibn Mâja., *Sunan*, *Abwâb al-adhân*, ch. 4, n. 722: 477.

[4]Al-Bukhârî., *Sahîh*, *Kitâb al-riqâq*, ch. 51, n. 6558: 299, n. 6566: 3, Abû Dâwûd., *Sunan*, *Kitâb al-sunna*, ch. 20-1, n. 4740: 233, Ibn Mâja., *Sunan*, *Abwâb al-zuhd*, ch. 37, n. 4315: 408.

[5]Abû Dâwûd., *Sunan*, *Kitâb al-sunna*, ch. 20-1, n. 4739: 233, Ibn Mâja., *Sunan*, *Abwâb al-zuhd*, ch. 37, n. 4310-11: 404.

[6]Ibn Mâja., *Sunan*, *Abwâb al-zuhd*, ch. 37, n. 4317: 410.

[7]Al-Bukhârî., *Sahîh*, *Kitâb al-tawhîd*, ch. 31, n. 7474: 346.

hadîth that appear to contradict this one: one, recorded by al-Bukhârî and Muslim, has Muhammad saying that he has been given five things that no one before him has been given and that one of these is intercession.[1]

A fifth strand is that various others – those who pray in groups (of forties or, in other places, one hundreds) for the dead, those who are martyrs or those who have memorized the Qur'ân can make intercession and their intercession will be heard. This intercession is either for the dead person, or for a certain number of their family members who were destined for the fire. Angels too are numbered among these who can intercede (al-Nasâ'î), as are other, unnamed intercessors.[2]

The sixth strand, carried for example by Abû Dâwûd, Ibn Mâja and Muslim, is that Muhammad is pre-eminent among the descendants of Adam and that his is the first intercession to be accepted.[3]

The seventh and final strand is that the other prophets will, in the final analysis, deflect their own intercessory prerogatives in favour of those of Muhammad. An example of one of these *hadîth*, which is carried by numerous transmitters and with varied details, reads:

> On the Day of Resurrection, the people will surge with each other like waves, and then they will come to Âdam and say: Please intercede for us with your Lord. He will say: I am not fit for that, but you had better go to Ibrâhîm, as he is the friend of the Beneficent. They will go to Ibrâhîm and he will say: I am not fit for that, but you had better go to Mûsâ, as he is the one to whom God spoke directly. So they will go to Mûsâ and he will say: I am not fit for that, but you had better go to ᶜÎsâ as he is a soul created by God and His Word. They will go to ᶜÎsâ and he will say: I am not fit for that, but you had better go to Muhammad. They would come to me and I would say: I am fit for that. Then I will ask for my Lord's permission, and it will be given, and then He will inspire me to praise Him with such praises, as I do not know now. So I will praise Him with those praises, and

[1]Al-Bukhârî., *Sahîh, Kitâb al-salât,* ch. 56, n. 438: 280-1, al-Nasâ'î., *Sunan, Kitab al-ghusl wa-l-tayammum,* ch. 26, n. 432: 254 .

[2]Muslim., *Sahîh, Kitâb al-janâ'iz,* ch. 18, n. 947: 479, ch. 19, n. 59, 479-80, Dâwûd., *Sunan, Kitâb al-jihâd,* ch. 26, n. 2522: 217, *Awwal kitâb al-janâ'iz,* ch. 40-1, n. 3170: 591, al-Nasâ'î., *Sunan, Kitâb al-tatbîq,* ch. 81, n. 1141: 164-5, *kitâb al-janâ'iz,* ch. 78, nn. 1993-5: 106-7, Ibn Mâja., *Sunan, Abwâb mâ jâ' fî al-janâ'iz,* ch. 19, n. 1489: 388-9, *Abwâb al-zuhd,* ch. 37, n. 4313: 408, n. 4316: 409, n. 4323: 413

[3]Abû Dâwûd., *Sunan, Kitâb al-sunna,* ch. 13, n. 4673: 195, Muslim., *Sahîh, Kitâb al-fadâ'il,* ch. 2, n. 3: 134, Ibn Mâja., *Sunan, Abwâb al-zuhd,* ch. 37, n. 4308: 402.

> will fall down prostrate before Him. Then it will be said: O Muhammad, raise your head and speak, for you will be listened to, and ask, for your request will be granted, and intercede, for your intercession will be accepted. I will say: O Lord, my followers! My followers! Then it will be said: Go and take out of Hell (Fire) all those who have faith in their hearts, equal to the weight of a barley grain. I will go and do so and return to praise Him with the same praises, and fall down (prostrate) before Him. Then it will be said: O Muhammad, raise your head and speak, for you will be listened to, and ask, for your request will be granted, and intercede, for your intercession will be accepted. I will say: O Lord, my followers! My followers! It will be said: Go and take out of it all those who have faith in their hearts equal to the weight of a small ant or a mustard seed. I will go and do so and return to praise Him with the same praises, and fall down in prostration before Him. It will be said: O, Muhammad, raise your head and speak, for you will be listened to, and ask, for your request will be granted, and intercede, for your intercession will be accepted. I will say, O Lord, my followers! Then He will say, Go and take out (all those) in whose hearts there is faith even to the lightest, lightest mustard seed. (Take them) out of the Fire. I will go and do so.[1]

Even the believing Muslims on earth can intercede for others,[2] and Muhammad's intercession is itself not restricted to the Day of Judgment: he speaks, for example, of the intercession he makes on earth for his uncle Abû Tâlib.[3] Muhammad also assures his intercession for those who ask *al-wasîla* (described as a rank in Paradise fitting only for one of God's servants) for him.[4]

In reality then, as one author points out, the weight of Islamic teaching falls on the side of intercession rather than against it.[5]

Within their theological tradition and piety, the Shîᶜa have no reservations about intercession, and uphold not merely the possibility but also the reality of the intercession of the prophets and the Imâms on behalf of their communities. Most especially, it is the intercession of the 'people of the house' (*ahl al-bayt*) – Muhammad,

[1]Al-Bukhârî., *Sahîh*, *Kitâb al-tafsîr*, ch. 1, n. 4476: 23, *Kitâb al-riqâq*, ch. 51, n. 6565: 302-3, *Kitâb al-tawhîd*, ch. 19, n. 7410: 304-6, n. 7440: 325-8, ch. 36, n. 7510: 362-5, Muslim., *Sahîh*, *Kitâb al-îmân*, ch. 84, n. 322: 315-7, n. 326: 319-323, n. 327: 323-6, Ibn Mâja., *Sunan*, *Abwâb al-zuhd*, ch. 37, n. 4312: 405-7.

[2]Muslim., *Sahîh*, vol. II, Book 11 (*Kitâb al-janâ'iz*), bb. 18, nn. 58-59: 654-655. These Traditions speak specifically of Muslims (one hundred or, alternatively, forty), whose intercession at the grave of a deceased believer will be accepted.

[3] Al-Bukhârî., *Sahîh*, vol. VIII, Book 78 (*Kitâb al-riqâq*), n. 569: 369.

[4] Muslim., *Sahîh*, vol. I, Book 4 (*Kitâb al-salât*), bb. 7, n. 11: 288-289.

[5] FITZGERALD M.L., "Mediation in Islam" in *Studia Missionalia*, vol. XXI, 1972: 196.

ᶜAlî, Fâtima, al-Hasan, al-Husayn and the Imâms after them that is a protection felt to be hugely valuable by the Shîᶜa. At the heart of this 'people of the house', sometimes called the 'house of sorrows' (*bayt al-ahzân*) for the sufferings inflicted upon it, stands Fâtima daughter of Muhammad: and it is within their comprehensive belief in intercession, and the permissibility of seeking such intercession, that the Shîᶜî theologians situate her extraordinary intercessory prerogatives. Intercession, we are told, is the dower of the Prophet's daughter:

> When Fâtima heard that her father was to give her in marriage, and had given dirhams for her as a dower, she said: My father, the girls of the rest of mankind are given in marriage with dirhams and dinars – and what is the difference between you and the rest of mankind? I will ask God, may He be exalted, to make my dower intercession for the sinners of your community. Instantly, Jibrîl descended, holding in his hand a piece of silk on which was written: God, may He be exalted, has made the dower of Fâtima the Radiant, daughter of Muhammad the chosen one, intercession for his sinful community. Fâtima ordered at the time of her departure from the world that the piece of silk be placed on her shroud. She said: When I am gathered on the Day of Resurrection, I will present this in my hand, and I will intercede for the sinners of my father's community."[1]

This is not, admittedly, a *hadîth* found in any of the major Shîᶜî books, but forms part of a genre of pious stories, told in different ways but always with a related subject matter. The account serves the constant theme of Fâtima's vindication by God, replacing her poor earthly dower with a remarkable influence, and using the recurring premise of God intervening in her life in a singular way. This theme of vindication, and of God giving Fâtima untold power as a reward for her suffering, is articulated in a *hadîth* in which her intercession, expressed in terms of her ability to judge God's creatures, is patently established by God himself. This narrative of popular piety, again not found in any of the major books of the Shîᶜî corpus, recounts words spoken by God to Muhammad during his 'night journey':

> "As to your daughter, I will make her stand near My Throne, and she will be told: God has made you judge over His creation. Whoever harmed you and harmed your offspring, judge them as you wish, and I will sanction your judgment concerning them…"[2]

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[1] SHÎRÂZÎ ◌., *Kalimat Fâtima*, Dâr al-ᶜUlûm, Beirut 2000: 68, 187.

[2] Al-Qummî., *Kâmil al-ziyârât*, n. 10: 334.

Other such stories tell of how Fâtima's hearing the voices of the sinners of Muhammad's community crying out is enough to cause God to release them from their torment:

> "Their voices ascended, and our mistress Fâtima heard their voices and said: I can hear the voices of the community of my father between the strata of the sun and the moon. Jibrîl heard the words of Fâtima and said: Let Muhammad be informed. Then the Truth, lofty His splendour, called out to him: Jibrîl, the cry of the sinful of the community of my beloved Muhammad has ascended to Me…go to Mâlik, keeper of the Fire, and order him to reduce the chastisement for them. He said: Jibrîl came to Mâlik and said to him: Mâlik, your Lord says: Open the door of the Fire for the people of grave sins of the community of Muhammad and reduce the chastisement for them."[1]

The narrative blends elements of the pious stories and accepted *hadîth* about Fâtima's intercessory powers as well as of Islamic theology already seen in the Sunnî *hadîth* about intercession: that God can bring people out of the Fire at His will (so that some people are ostensibly affected only temporarily by the chastisement of the Fire). Fâtima's hearing the distressed voices of the sinners is enough for her intercessory prerogatives to be honoured and her 'dower' to be fulfilled: that she would intercede specifically for the sinners of her father's community. In fact, as we shall see, her intercessory powers are somewhat wider than that, and contain elements that are both active and passive, both positive and negative. Two basic themes will suffice for our purposes: Fâtima's triumphal entry into Paradise, and the various types of intercession she makes, for a variety of people.

> "On the Day of Resurrection, a herald will call from the middle of the throne: O people of the Resurrection, lower your gaze, for Fâtima the daughter of Muhammad is crossing…"[2]

A number of the Shîᶜî transmitters clarify that it is precisely as Fâ✷ima is crossing the Bridge[1] that the call arises for gazes to be lowered in deference to her exalted status.[2]

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[1] SHÎRÂZÎ H., *Kalimat Fâtima*, 2000: 79.

[2] Among the Shîᶜa, cf. for example al-Tabarî., *Dalâ'il al-imâma*: 57, al-Sadûq., *Kitâb al-amâlî fî al-ahâdîth wa-l-akhbâr*, n. 4: 17, al-Tabarî., *Bishârat al-mustafâ*: 18, al-Sadûq., *ᶜUyûn akhbâr al-Ridâ*, vol. II, n. 55: 32. Among the Sunnî, cf. for example Ibn Hanbal., *Musnad*, vol. III, Book 31 (*Kitâb maᶜrifat al-sahâba*), *Manâqib Fâtima bt. rasûl Allâh*, n. 4791, p. 180, n. 4821: 190, al-Baghdâdî., *Ta'rîkh Baghdâd*, vol. VIII, n. 4234: 141. Also found in al-Khawârizmî, Ibn Athîr, al-Haythamî et al.

Some of the Sunnî transmitters, like Ibn Hanbal and al-Haythamî add that she will be wearing 'two green mantles',[3] while others note that "she will pass by with seventy thousand servants from the black-eyed maidens of Paradise, like brilliant lightening…"[4] Within the large corpus of Shîᶜî *hadîth* which concern eschatology, and particularly in terms of Fâtima, two basic strands are dominant: the first concerns the entry of Fâtima into Paradise, and the second details her status there. In terms of the first strand, al-Majlisî carries a *hadîth* which at once causes some difficulty:

> "The Messenger of God said: The first person to enter Paradise will be Fâtima. She is to this community what Maryam was to the children of Israel."[5]

Ibn Shahrâshûb transmits it in his *Manâqib âl Abî Ṭâlib* from Abû Sâlih in his *al-Arbaᶜîna*.[6] Al-Majlisî transmits it from al-Daylamî in his *Kitâb al-firdaws*, and from Abû Sâlih. Among the Sunnî, al-Dhahabî also carries it from Abû Sâlih,[7] but it is found in no other major transmitter, Shîᶜa or Sunnî. This *hadîth* appears to gainsay a number of others: it contradicts a *hadîth*, carried by large numbers of Shîᶜa and Sunnî transmitters, in which Muhammad assures Fâtima that she will be the first to follow him. Presumably, she is therefore the second, and not the first to enter into Paradise, unless one interprets Muhammad's words strictly in the sense that she will be the first to follow him in death, without any allusion to an entry into Paradise. It also contradicts a body of *hadîth* carried by Shîᶜî scholars in which Muhammad maintains that he himself will be the first to enter Paradise, and that ᶜAlî, Fâtima, al-Hasan and al-Husayn will follow after him:[8] and some *hadîth* in which Muhammad claims that he, ᶜAlî, Fâtima, al-Hasan and al-Husayn will enter Paradise together:[9] and finally, a number of *hadîth* in which it is ᶜAlî, and not Fâtima, who is given the promise of being first. ᶜAlî will be, with Muhammad, the first for whom the tombs split open, the first, with Muhammad, to stand on the Bridge, the first, with Muhammad, to be robed with heavenly garments,

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[1]The Bridge (*al-sirât*) denotes the bridge that traverses Hell. This concept is not articulated in the Qur'ân, but abounds in the Shîᶜî and Sunnî books of Tradition.

[2]Al-Tabarî., *Dalâ'il al-imâma*: 50, 65, al-Mufîd., *al-Amâlî li-l-Mufîd*, n. 6: 130. Also carried by Ibn Shahrâshûb, al-Irbilî, al-Hillî al-ᶜAllâma, al-Majlisî et al.

[3]Ibn Hanbal., *Musnad*, vol. III, Book 31 (*Kitâb maᶜrifat al-sahâba*), *Manâqib Fâtima bt. rasûl Allâh*, n. 4821: 190 (who notes that some texts read 'red' rather than 'green'). Also found in al-Haythamî and al-Shablanjî.

[4]Al-Khawârizmî., *Maqtal al-Husayn*, Part I, ch. 5, *Fadâ'il Fâtima al-Zahrâ' bt. rasûl Allâh*, n. 11: 94-95.

[5]Al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. XXXVII, bb. 50, n. 38: 70, vol. XLIII, bb. 3, n. 44: 44.

[6]Ibn Shahrâshûb., *Manâqib âl Abî Tâlib*, vol. III, bb. *Manâqib Fâtima al-Zahrâ'*: 377.

[7]Al-Dhahabî., *Mîzân al-iᶜtidâl fî tarâjim al-rijâl* vol. II, bb. *Harf al-ᶜayn*, n. 5057: 618.

[8]Al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. XXVIII, bb. 2, n. 8: 45, vol. XXXVII, bb. 50, n. 54: 191, vol. LXV, bb. 18, n. 56: 127.

[9] Al-Tabarî., *Bishârat al-mustafâ*: 46. Also carried by al-Irbilî and al-Hillî al-ᶜAllâma.

the first, with Muhammad, to stand on the right of the throne, the first, with Muhammad, to knock on the door of Paradise and the first, with Muhammad, to drink the sweet nectar of heaven.[1]

Other *hadîth* which specify her entrance into Paradise are infused with themes of the magnificent vestments of Paradise, of light and of angelic activity, and even the name of the she-camel, al-ᶜAdbâ', on which Fâtima will ride…"[2]

> "The Messenger of God said: My daughter Fâtima will be gathered wearing the garment of esteem soaked in the water of Life.[3] The creatures will look at her and marvel over her. Then she will also be clothed with the garments of Paradise, one thousand garments, and written on each garment in green script: let the daughter of Muhammad enter Paradise in the most beautiful form, the most beautiful esteem and the most beautiful appearance. She will be led into Paradise as a bride is led, and seventy thousand servants will be assigned to her."[4]

The golden thread running through all the narratives about Fâtima on the Last Day is that God vindicates her: here, in the preceding narrative, this vindication is noticeably articulated. Apparently scorned and neglected on earth, Fâtima now wears the vestments of esteem. All of creation must now lower their gaze before the one who on earth suffered such ill-treatment at the hands of some of her father's own followers. This woman, who experienced the humility of a meagre dower and such poverty in her married life, is now clothed in heavenly garments and enters Paradise like a bride. After years of hard and painful toil on earth, she has numerous servants entrusted to her.

The Shîᶜî transmitters develop this theme:

> "On the Day of Resurrection, a herald will call before the throne: O assembly of the creatures, lower your gaze until Fâtima the daughter of Muhammad has passed by. She will be the first to be vested, and twelve thousand maidens of Paradise…will meet her, and with them, fifty thousand angels on thoroughbreds of sapphire, their flanks of chrysolite and their halters of fresh pearl, wearing saddle bags of pearls, on each saddle bag a cushion of silk brocade. She will cross

[1] Al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. XL, bb. 91, n. 70: 35, vol. XLIII, bb. 5, n. 11: 99, vol. LXXIV, bb. 3: 62.

[2] Al-ᶜAdbâ' is the name of Muhammad's own she-camel. Cf. al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. VII, bb. 8, nn. 1-2: 230-231, vol. XI, bb. 6, n. 6: 380, vol. LXV, bb. 18, n. 25: 112.

[3] Cf. Q. 29: 64.

[4] Al-Tabarî., *Dalâ'il al-imâma*: 57-58, al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. XXIII, bb. 63, n. 60: 274, vol. XLIII, bb. 8, n. 6: 221, n. 12: 224. Also carried by al-Sadûq.

> the Bridge with them...the people of Paradise will welcome her, and she will sit on a throne of light and they will sit around her...
> God will send to her (an angel) not sent to anyone before her or after her, and he will say to her: Your Lord greets you with peace and says to you: ask Me what I can give you. She will say...I ask Him to let me intercede for my offspring and my progeny and for those who are affectionate to them after me and who defend them after me. He said: God will reveal to that angel, without him having moved from his place, to inform her: I have allowed her to intercede for her offspring and her progeny and those who are affectionate to them and love them and defend them after her. He said: She will say: Praise be to God who has removed the grief from me and gladdened my eyes. [1]

Although we have seen *hadîth* in which Muhammad promises ᶜAlî that he will be the first, with Muhammad, to be robed with heavenly garments, this *hadîth* patently names Fâtima as the recipient of that honour. Once more, the important elements are present: entering Paradise in untold glory, all her long sorrow wiped away by God, who has favoured her above all other women, and now gifts her with the power of intercessory prayer.

Fâtima's intercessory prerogatives start with a plea for justice, in a genre comprising three basic strands, of which a short example of each will suffice. In the first, Fâtima holds before God the bloodied shirt of al-Husayn as a means of beseeching justice. In the second, she is confronted with her murdered son, blood streaming from his jugular vein. In the third, she is confronted with his headless body, and fails at first to recognize him. The *leitmotif* of al-Husayn's blood-stained shirt held before God by Fâtima is found in a number of *hadîth*. This moment marks the zenith of all her mourning and grief.

> "On the Day of Resurrection, God will gather the first and the last on an equal footing, and a herald will call: Lower your gaze and bow your heads, until Fâtima the daughter of Muhammad has crossed the Bridge. He said: the creatures will cast down their gaze, and Fâtima will arrive on a thoroughbred of the thoroughbreds of Paradise, accompanied by seventy thousand angels, and she will halt in a noble place of the places of the Resurrection. Then she will descend from her thoroughbred, and she will take the shirt of al-Husayn b. ᶜAlî, stained with his blood, in her hand, and she will say: O Lord, this is the shirt of my son. You know what was done to him..."[2]

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[1] Al-Tabarî., *Dalâ'il al-imâma*: 57, al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. XXIV, bb. 23, n. 60: 274-275.

[2] Al-Mufîd., *al-Amâlî li-l-Mufîd*, n. 6: 130, al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. XLIII, bb. 8, n. 11: 224.

The *hadîth* is further amplified:

> "One day the Messenger of God went to see Fâtima, and she was mourning, and he spoke to her concerning the circumstances of the Resurrection, concerning which he said: You will say: Show me al-Hasan and al-Husayn, and they will come to you, the jugular vein of al-Husayn streaming with blood. He will say: O Lord, obtain for me today my due from those who mistreated me…"[1]

This *hadîth* is noteworthy because it is al-Husayn, and not Fâtima, who pleads for justice from God. It is transmitted by al-Majlisî only from Furât al-Kûfî, and is found in none of the major Shîʿî books. In some accounts, again transmitted only by al-Majlisî from Furât al-Kûfî, it is her son who comes to meet her:

> "When she arrives at the door of her palace, she will find al-Hasan standing there, and al-Husayn standing there, the head severed. She will say to al-Hasan: Who is this, and he will say: My brother. The community of your father killed him and cut off his head…"[2]

This *hadîth*, found in none of the major Shîʿî books, presupposes that Fâtima knows nothing of al-Husayn's murder and decapitation, and is first appraised of this by al-Hasan. In fact, the whole thrust of Shîʿî teaching posits her ceaseless mourning until the Day of Resurrection precisely because the Karbalâ' event.

An examination of the name 'Fâtima' brings to light that God named her so because, among other reasons, her followers (*shîʿa*) have been 'separated' or 'weaned' (*f-t-m*) from the Fire, and her enemies have been 'separated' from her love. A further *hadîth* revealed that God saved her offspring from the Fire because Fâtima was chaste. Already in these two strands – her name and her chastity – is prefigured the power of her intercession: both threads stress that God has saved people from Hell because of Fâtima. In these cases, she is a somewhat passive agent of intercession, with God acting because of her. In fact, this passive intercession of Fâtima is, according to the books of Shîʿî *hadîth*, not only a factor of her name and her chastity, but also of her pre-existence. For our

[1]Al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. VIII, bb. 21, n. 62: 53, b. 23, n. 116: 172, vol. XLIII, bb. 8, n. 13: 225. Cf. al-Kûfî., *Tafsîr Furât b. Ibrâhîm*: 222.

[2]Al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. V, bb. 17, n. 21: 335, vol. XLIII, bb. 3, n. 54: 62, vol. LXV, bb. 15, n. 109: 59. Cf. al-Kûfî., *Tafsîr Furât b. Ibrâhîm*: 269, 437.

purposes, a number of specific *hadîth* are of note, all of them transmitted by al-Majlisî and mentioned by al-Mûsawî in his biographical work.[1]

Firstly, the prophets and holy ones asked for firmness of purpose through Fâtima, specifically as a member of the 'people of the house'. In response to a question put to him about whether he was more excellent than Mûsâ, the prophet to whom God spoke and to whom He sent down the *Tawrât* and the staff, and for whom He split the sea, and whom He shaded with the clouds, Muhammad replied:

> "When Âdam incurred sin, his repentance was to say: God, I ask You by the truth of Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, if it You would not forgive me, and God forgave it him. And Nûh, when he boarded the ark and feared drowning, said: God, I ask You by the truth of Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, if You would not deliver me from drowning, and God delivered him from it. And Ibrâhîm, when he was cast into the fire, said: God, I ask You by the truth of Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, if You would not deliver me from it, and God made it coolness and peace for him.[2] And Mûsâ, when his staff was cast down and he was filled with a sense of foreboding, said: God, I ask You by the truth of Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, if You would not safeguard me. And God, lofty His splendour said: Do not fear! You are the higher."[3]

Iblîs[4] desired redemption and asked God for it by the truth of Fâtima. In the course of a narrative concerning a female *jinn* said to be named ᶜAfrâ', the following dialogue occurs:

> "ᶜAfrâ' came, and the Prophet said to her: ᶜAfrâ', where were you? She said: I was visiting a sister of mine. He said: Happy those who love one another in God and visit each other, ᶜAfrâ'! What did you see? She said: I saw many marvels. He said: What marvels did you see? She said: I saw Iblîs in the green sea on a white rock, his hands stretched out to the heavens, and he was saying: My God, when You have fulfilled Your oath and made me enter the Fire of Hell, I will ask You by the truth of Muhammad, and ᶜAlî, and Fâtima, and al-Hasan and al-Husayn if You

[1] Al-MÛSAWÎ M., *al-Kawthar fî ahwâl Fâtima bt. al-nabî al-athar*, 2000, v. I: 189-198, 205-209, 210-212, 215-218, 219-224.

[2] Cf. Q. 21: 69.

[3] Cf. Q. 20: 67-68. Al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. XVI, bb. 11: 366, vol. XXVI, bb. 7, n. 1: 319. Also carried by al-Sadûq, al-Nîsâbûrî, al-Tabarsî et al.

[4] One of the Islamic names denoting Satan.

> would not liberate me and gather me with them. So I said: Hârith,[1] what are these names by which you plead? He said: I saw them on the leg of the Throne seven thousand years before God, powerful and lofty, created Âdam, and I perceived that they were the most distinguished of the creation for God: and I am pleading by them. The Prophet said: By God, were the people of the earth to entreat by these names, God, may He be exalted, would answer them."[2]

Ostensibly, the prayer of Iblîs is not answered. But the prayer of the prophets and the prayer of Yûsuf in prison *are* answered through Fâtima. In a group of *hadîth*, elements of which have widespread occurrence throughout the Shîᶜî corpus of *hadîth*, we find God instructing Mûsâ to strike the sea with his staff,[3] saying "God, by the standing of Muhammad and his noble family" as he does so,[4] as well as a story of Yûsuf in prison, in which he is instructed to say a prayer that includes the following sentiment: "I ask You by the truth of Muhammad and his family, to create for me in my situation a release and a way out, and to bestow upon me what I anticipate and what I do not anticipate."[5]

It seems to be incumbent upon God to answer and not refuse the prayer of whoever asks by the truth of Fâtima (*bi-haqqi Fâtima*). A final group of *hadîth* reveals that Fâtima's is among the five names most loved by God,[6] and that He cannot but answer prayer made through these names.

> "The Messenger of God said: On the Day of Resurrection, when the people of Paradise are settled in Paradise and the people of the Fire in the Fire, a servant who remained in the Fire for seventy autumns – and an autumn is seventy years – will ask God, powerful and lofty, and will cry out to Him, saying: Lord, I ask You by the truth of Muhammad and the people of his house if You would not have mercy on me! He said: And God, lofty His splendour, will reveal to Jibrîl: descend to My servant and lead him out. Jibrîl will say: Lord, how is it possible

[1] One of the names given to Iblîs before his fall. Cf. WENSINCK A.J., "Iblis" in *SEI*, H.A.R Gibb et al. (eds.), E.J. Brill, Leiden 1995: 145-146.

[2] Al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. XVIII, bb. 9, n. 1: 83, vol. XXVII, bb. 11, n. 1: 13, vol. LX, bb. 2, n. 36: 80, vol. XCI, bb. 28, n. 15: 20. Also carried by al-Sadûq, al-Irbilî and al-Tabarsî.

[3] Cf. Q. 20: 77.

[4] Examples of this Tradition may be found in al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. XIII, bb. 4, n. 54: 138, vol. XCI, bb. 28, n. 8: 2, al-Tabarsî., *Khâtimat mustadrak al-wasâ'il*, vol. V, bb. 35, n. 10-5766: 233.

[5] Al-ᶜAyyâshî., *Tafsîr*, vol. II, bb. 12, n. 88: 198, al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. XII, bb. 9, n. 147: 319, vol. XCII, bb. 106, n. 23: 193.

[6] Al-Mufîd., *al-Ikhtisâs*,: 222, al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. XXII, bb. 10, n. 63: 347, vol. XXXVII, bb. 50, n. 43: 76, vol. XCI, bb. 28, n. 16: 21, al-Tabarsî., *Khâtimat mustadrak al-wasâ'il*, vol. V, bb. 35, n. 1-5757-14: 228.

> for me to descend into the Fire? God, may He be blessed and exalted, will say: I have ordered it to be coolness and peace for you. Jibrîl will say: Lord, what information have I about his location? God will say: He is in a pit of imprisonment. Jibrîl will descend and find him, recognizing him by his face, and will lead him out and stand him before God, powerful and lofty. God, powerful and lofty, will say: My servant! How long did you abide, imploring me in the Fire. He will say: Lord, I cannot count it. God, powerful and lofty, will say: by My might and My splendour, had not someone asked Me by their truth with Me, I would have looked upon his despicableness in the Fire. But it is My resolution that no servant would ask me by the truth of Muhammad and the people of his house, but that I would forgive him what was between us. Today I have forgiven you. Then he will be ordered into Paradise." [1]

All of these *hadîth* make Fâtima's intercession contingent upon her membership of the pre-existent 'holy family', but it is a mode of intercession nonetheless, even if in a passive form.

In other *hadîth*, Fâtima's intercession ceases to be passive and becomes active, and changes from a negative plea for the punishment of those who have done evil to a positive cry for those in need. Having effectively pled with God for justice to be done, she now turns her mediatory powers to four main groups of people.

The first are her progeny and those who love them. The large majority of *hadîth* recounting the intercession of Fâtima make her progeny and those who love them the primary recipients (and first two groups) of her intercessory powers. These recipients are named as her own adherents (*shîᶜa*), her offspring and all who loved and supported the 'people of the house', (a love that may be expressed merely by grieving for them). These groups are clarified by Fâtima herself as she pleads before the Throne:

> "On the Day of Resurrection, my daughter Fâtima will approach on a she-camel of Paradise…Jibrîl will take halter of the camel, shouting at the top of his voice: Lower your gaze, while Fâtima the daughter of Muhammad is crossing. There will not remain at that time a prophet or a messenger or a righteous one or a martyr but that they will lower their gaze while Fâtima is crossing. She will journey until she is facing the Throne of her Lord, lofty His splendour. She will

[1] Al-Tabarî., *Bishârat al-mustafâ*: 210, al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. VII, bb. 24, n. 4: 282, vol. XXVII, bb. 9, n. 5: 312, vol. XCI, bb. 28, n. 1: 1, al-Tabarsî., *Khâtimat mustadrak al-wasâ'il*, vol. V, bb. 35, n. 3-5759: 228. Also carried by al-Sadûq, al-Mufîd et al.

> throw herself from her she-camel and say: My God and my Master, judge between me and those who harmed me. God, judge between me and those who killed my son. And then the call will come from God, lofty His splendour: My beloved and daughter of My beloved, ask Me your desire and make your intercession before Me, and by My might and My splendour the wickedness of the oppressor will not pass Me. She will say: My God and my Master, my progeny, and my adherents, and the adherents of my progeny, and those who love me and the lovers of my progeny. And then the call will come from God, lofty His splendour: Where are the progeny of Fâtima, and her adherents, and those who love her and the lovers of her progeny? They will draw near, encircled by the angels of mercy, and Fâtima will go before them until she has led them into Paradise."[1]

In another *hadîth*, Fâtima's arrival is described in much a similar vein, but when she reaches the gates of Paradise, she hesitates and turns around, eliciting a question from God:

> "God will say: Daughter of My beloved! Why do you turn around, when I have bade you enter My Paradise? She will say: Lord! I desired that my standing be known on a day like this. God will say: Daughter of My beloved! Return and see who has in his heart love for you or one of your progeny, take him by the hand and lead him into Paradise. By God, on that day she will pick out her adherents and those who love her the way a bird picks out the good seed from the perishable seed."[2]

The texts employ other images, besides that of a bird picking out good seed: one set of *hadîth* narrates that those who love Fâtima will cling to the hem of her cloak[3] and will be delivered by her from the Fire, while another strand tells us that:

> "Fâtima has a position at the gate of Hell. On the Day of Resurrection, between the eyes of every man will be written 'believer' or 'rejecter of faith'.[4] A lover

[1] Al-Tabarî., *Bishârat al-mustafâ*: 18, al-Sadûq., *Kitâb al-amâlî fî al-ahâdîth wa-l-akhbâr*, n. 4: 17, al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. VIII, bb. 21, n. 62: 53, vol. XLIII, bb. 8, n. 1: 219, n. 13: 227. Cf. also al-Kûfî., *Tafsîr Furât b. Ibrâhîm*, n. 587: 446. Also carried by al-Shablanjî and al-Nîsâbûrî.

[2] Al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. VIII, bb. 21, n. 59: 51, vol. XLIII, bb. 3, n. 57: 64. Cf. also al-Kûfî., *Tafsîr Furât b. Ibrâhîm*, n. 403: 298.

[3] Al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. VIII, bb. 22, n. 12: 68, vol. XVII, bb. 2, n. 2: 242.

[4] The Arabic *kufr* and its derivatives are difficult to render: its basic meaning is to be irreligious or ungrateful. Pickthall fluctuates between 'unbeliever' and 'disbeliever', but I have chosen, following Ayoub, to render it 'rejection of faith',

> whose sins were many will be ordered to the Fire, and she will read between his eyes, 'lover'. Then she will say: My God and my Master! You have named me Fâtima and by me have weaned from the Fire those who support me and support my progeny. Your promise is true and You never fail to keep Your promise. God, powerful and lofty, will say: You have spoken the truth, Fâtima! I named you Fâtima and by you weaned from the Fire those who love and support you and love and support your progeny. My promise is true and I never fail to keep My promise. But I ordered this servant of mine to the Fire that you might intercede for him, and I will accept your intercession, that I might make manifest to My angels, My prophets, My messengers and the people of the gathering your standing and place with Me. Whoever you read between his eyes 'believer', draw him out by his hand and make him enter paradise."[1]

About this *hadîth*, Ayoub writes:

> "This Tradition provides one of the clearest expressions of the concept of redemption in Shīᶜī piety…Fātimah's role, as depicted in the Tradition we have just cited, is more than that of an intercessor. She is given the authority to counteract the divine judgment. She does not intercede on the behalf of a believer that his punishment may be lightened, but rather saves a sinner from the torment of hell altogether."[2]

Striking in the narrative is the juxtaposition of the word 'lover' (of the 'people of the house') with the word 'believer': the two are used interchangeably, suggesting that they are one and the same thing. A believer is tantamount to one who loves and supports Fâtima and her progeny.

The second group comprises non-Shîᶜa who love her progeny. An admittedly rare *hadîth* offers a place in Fâtima's intercessory prayers for those who were not her adherents, that is, members of the Shîᶜa, but who loved her and her progeny nonetheless:

> "There will come to her the call from God: Daughter of the beloved of God, I have related to you what the community of your father did to him, because I have

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with the passive participle as 'rejecter of faith'. Cf. AYOUB M., *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*, vol. II, *The House of ᶜImrān*, Albany 1992: 40.

[1] Al-Sadûq., *ᶜIlal al-sharâ'iᶜ wa-l-ahkâm*, vol. I, bb. 142, n. 6: 179, al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. VIII, bb. 21, n. 57: 50, vol. XLIII, bb. 2, n. 11: 14.

[2] AYOUB M., *Redemptive Suffering in Islam. A Study of the Devotional Aspects of ᶜAshura in Twelver Shiᶜism*, 1978: 214.

> stored up for you with Me, consolation in your calamity concerning him: indeed, I have arranged for your consolation in your calamity. I will not consider calling humanity to account until you enter Paradise, you and your progeny and your adherents and those who were not of your adherents but who supported you in a friendly manner, before I consider calling humanity to account. And so Fâtima my daughter will enter Paradise, and her progeny and her adherents and those who were not of her adherents but who supported her in a friendly manner. For these are the words of God, may He be exalted, in His Book, «*the Supreme Horror will not grieve them*»:[1] He said: this is the Day of Resurrection: «*while they abide in that which their souls desire*»:[2] this, by God, is Fâtima, and her progeny and her adherents and those who were not of her adherents but who supported her in a friendly manner."[3]

This *hadîth*, transmitted by al-Mağlisî only from Furât al-Kûfî, is a continuation of the one already related, in which Fâtima is confronted with the headless body of al-Husayn. In reality, it revisits the theme of a passive intercession: those who are described entering Paradise do so because, even if they were not her progeny or her adherents, they supported her. Al-Mûsawî, who relates this text with a number of errors, argues that it implies her effective intercession: that Fâtima will actively cause those mentioned in the narrative, including non-adherents who supported her, to enter Paradise:[4] but a careful reading of the extant text does not convey this meaning. Nevertheless, the element of her intercession remains vital.

A third group comprises a number of women:

> "[Fâtima] will conduct the women believers of my community into Paradise. Whichever woman prayed, day and night, the five prayers, and fasted in the month of Ramadân, and made the Pilgrimage to the holy house of God, and gave of her money in almsgiving, and obeyed her husband, and supported ᶜAlî after me, will enter Paradise through the intercession of my daughter Fâtima."[5]

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[1] Cf. Q. 21: 103.

[2] Cf. Q. 21: 102.

[3] Al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. VII, bb. 17, n. 21: 335, vol. XLIII, bb. 3, n. 54: 62, vol. LXV, bb. 15, n. 109: 59. Cf. al-Kûfî., *Tafsîr Furât b. Ibrâhîm*, n. 362: 269, n. 578: 437.

[4] Cf. al-MÛSAWÎ M., *al-Kawthar*, 2000, v. VII: 390.

[5] Al-Tabarî., *Bishârat al-mustafâ*: 177, al-Sadûq., *Kitâb al-amâlî fî al-ahâdîth wa-l-akhbâr*, n. 18: 468, al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. VIII, bb. 21, n. 76: 58, vol. XXXVII, bb. 50, n. 52: 84, vol. XLIII, bb. 3, n. 20: 24.

It is of note that the Shîᶜî transmitter al-Tabarsî in his *Mustadrak*, reproduces this *hadîth* word for word, but omits the name of Fâtima or any mention of her intercession,[1] making the entry of the women into Paradise dependant rather upon their faithful living out of the Islamic faith.

In summary, the majority of *hadîth* giving details about Fâtima's intercession are rare, transmitted mostly by Furât al-Kûfî, and from him by al-Majlisî. Firmly entrenched both among the Shîᶜa and the Sunnî transmitters is the call to all creatures to lower their gaze as Fâtima crosses the Bridge: the subsequent details are less decisive, even among the Shîᶜî transmitters. While her intercession for her progeny, as well as the prayer of Iblîs and some of the prophets through Fâtima and the 'people of the house' find a fairly strong resonance in the Shîᶜî books, a number of the narratives examined – such as those concerning the bleeding al-Husayn or his headless corpse – are not well-substantiated.

All of these themes, from the *hadîth* of both the Shîᶜa and the Sunnî, are gathered together in a lengthy narrative found in popular Shîᶜî piety:

> "I heard the Commander of the Faithful, ᶜAlî b. Abî Tâlib saying: The Messenger of God came to call on Fâtima one day, and she was sorrowful. He said to her: What is this sorrow of yours, my child? She replied: My father, I was thinking of the place of congregation and the people standing, denuded on the Day of Resurrection. He said: My child, a truly momentous day! But Jibrîl has already informed me from God, powerful and lofty, that He said: the first for whom the world will burst asunder on the Day of Resurrection will be me, then…Ibrâhîm, then your husband ᶜAlî b. Abî Tâlib. Then God will dispatch Jibrîl to you with seventy thousand angels, who will fashion seven domes of light upon your tomb. Then Isrâfîl[2] will bring you three vestments of light, and standing at your head, will call to you: Fâtima, daughter of Muhammad, betake yourself to your place of congregation. You will rise, your soul at peace…Isrâfîl will offer you the vestments and you will put them on. Rûfâ'îl[3] will bring to you a thoroughbred of light, its halter of fresh pearls and upon it, a litter of gold. You will mount it, and Rûfâ'îl will lead it by its halter. In front of you will be seventy thousand angels, bearing in their hands banners glorifying God. And when the procession has

[1] Cf. al-Tabarsî., *Khâtimat mustadrak al-wasâ'il,* vol. XIV, bb. 71, n. 9-16646: 258.

[2] The angel who sounds the last trumpet. Cf. WENSINCK A.J., "Isrāfīl" in *SEI,* H.A.R Gibb et al. (eds.), E.J. Brill, Leiden 1995: 184.

[3] One of the angels of the seven heavens. Cf. MURATA S., "The Angels" in S.H Nasr (ed.), *Islamic Spirituality. Foundations,* 1997: 328.

hastened with you, seventy thousand black-eyed maidens of Paradise will welcome you, rejoicing because of you: in the hand of each one of them, a censer of light, from which rises a wind of intensity, without fire: and adorning them, garlands of jewels adorned with pieces of iron of the deepest green: they will journey on your right.

When you have proceeded another distance, as far from the one from your grave to the place of meeting the maidens of Paradise, Maryam daughter of ᶜImrân will welcome you, with a similar number of those who are with you of the maidens of Paradise: and she will greet you and will journey, she and those who are with her, on your left. Then your mother Khadîja, daughter of Khuwaylid, the first of the believers in God and His Messenger, will welcome you. With her will be seventy thousand angels, banners of exaltation in their hands. When you have approached through the gathering, you will be welcomed by Hawwâ' (Eve), amid seventy thousand maidens of Paradise, and with her, Âsiya, the daughter of Mazâhim, who will journey with you, she and those who are with her. And when you stand in the middle of the gathering – in other words, God will gather the creatures without distinction – they will stand upright (on their feet) (before you). Then a herald will call from under the throne, in the hearing of the creatures: lower your gaze until Fâ✷ima the righteous, the daughter of Muhammad, and those who are with her have crossed. On that day, no-one will look at you except Ibrâhîm, the friend of the Merciful, and ᶜAlî b. Abî Tâlib. Âdam will look for Hawwâ', and will see her in front of you, with your mother Khadîja.

Then a pulpit of light will be set up for you, comprising seven layers, with ranks of angels between each layer, holding in their hands banners of light, and with the black-eyed maidens of Paradise standing in formation on the right of the pulpit and on its left. The nearest of the women to you will be Hawwâ', and Âsiya on your left. When you have reached the uppermost part of the pulpit, Jibrîl will come to you and say to you: Fâtima, ask what you desire! You will say: My Lord show me al-Hasan and al-Husayn! They will come to you, the jugular vein of al-Husayn streaming with blood. He will say: Lord, obtain for me today my due from those who mistreated me. Thereupon, the Majestic will grow angry, and because of His anger, Hell and all the angels will grow angry, and thereupon Hell will sigh deeply, with a great sigh. Then a detachment will go out from the fire, and they will gather the killers of al-Husayn and their sons, and the sons of their sons, and these will say: Lord, we did not take part (in the killing of) al-Husayn!

> God will say to the violent thrusters of Hell:[1] Seize them by their mark! By the blueness of eye and the blackness of face! Seize them by their forelocks and fling them into the bottom of the lowest part of the Fire! For indeed they were severer against the supporters of al-Husayn then were their fathers who fought against al-Husayn and killed him! And their groaning will be heard in Hell!
>
> Then Jibrîl will say: Fâtima, ask what you desire! You will say: My Lord, my adherents! And God, powerful and lofty, will say: I have already pardoned them. And you will say: My Lord, the adherents of my son! And God will say: I have already pardoned them. And you will say: My Lord, the adherents of my adherents! And God will say: Be free, and whoever adheres to you will be with you in Paradise: and thereupon, the creatures will wish that they had been supporters of Fâtima.
>
> She said: My father, I would not like to see the day of your death or to remain behind after you. He said: My child, Jibrîl has already informed me from God that you will be the first to join me from the people of my house: affliction for all those who mistreated you, and great victory for those who assisted you."[2]

As it stands, this narrative is found only in the work of Furât al-Kûfî[3] (and is transmitted from him by al-Majlisî), although several of its elements can be discerned in other Shîʿî books of *hadîth*. No less so, some of the dialogue is very similar to some of the early Sunnî *hadîth* about Muhammad's intercession. As a pious narrative, it serves a number of important purposes: it dramatically augments the glory of Fâtima's entry into Paradise, already seen some of the Shîʿî and Sunnî transmitters, in terms of her vestments, her mount, the themes of light and angelic activity, as well as in those who meet her in welcome. It also clearly exemplifies the subservience of all the other women of Paradise to Fâtima, and initiates her work of intercession. This began as a negative mediation, pleading punishment for the killers of al-Husayn, and when this had been accomplished, moved to a positive prayer for all who support her, articulated as her adherents (*shîʿa*), the adherents of her son al-Husayn, and the adherents of her adherents.

Although any deliberation about Mary in terms of Islam almost invariably relates to the person of Maryam in the Qur'ân, it is not hard to distinguish, both in Fatima's life and

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[1] The guards of Hell, named in Q. 96: 18 as *al-Zabâniyya*, literally 'violent thrusters'.

[2] Al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. VIII, bb. 21, n. 62: 53-55.

[3] Cf. al-Kûfî., *Tafsîr Furât b. Ibrâhîm*, n. 587: 334-335.

in the theology constructed around her by Shîʿî Tradition, teaching and popular piety, elements strongly identifiable with the Mariology that is specific to the Roman Catholic Church, leading one into the engaging temptation of drawing comparisons between the Fâtima of Islam and the Mary of Catholicism. Although there is always the danger of pushing an analogy too far, such comparisons may be regarded as valid without necessarily being unequivocal or incontestable. However, since there remains a considerable disparity between the claims made by Catholicism about Mary and her Son, and the claims of the Shîʿa about Fâtima and hers, it is not a comparison that we propose, although sometimes this will be inevitable and useful: rather, we suggest possible parallels between the Shîʿî theology and the key Catholic doctrines about Mary. Consequently, there is no suggestion of equality in the lives, but rather an attempt to underscore certain common strands of thought.

As a context in which to examine the feasibility of parallels between Fâtima and Mary, we need to summarize the most important Catholic teachings about Mary. This will be necessarily concise, proposing only the most important elements of each doctrine. Within Catholic dogma, the life and doctrine of the Virgin Mary might be encapsulated in four basic categories (delineated by Scripture, theology and popular piety):

1. Her conception without sin in the womb of her mother, and the supernatural intervention embedded in the stories of her conception and birth. While all of humanity inherits at birth a human nature tarnished by sin – 'Original Sin' – as the consequence of Adam's fall, Mary was, by an extraordinary act of God, set free from this flaw in the very instant of her conception. Preserved from contracting Original Sin, she is thus said to have inherited human nature in its initial, unsoiled condition, and this by the merits of the future redemptive act of her Son.

2. The miracle stories surrounding the virginal conception and birth of Jesus. It is, for the adherents of Catholicism, an article of faith that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a virgin before, during, and after the conception and birth of her son. This doctrine, like the declaration of her Immaculate Conception, is the culmination of centuries of theological thought, sometimes flawed, first articulated by the Fathers of the Church, but which had its roots in much earlier traditions. Mary's perpetual virginity is understood as quintessentially physical: and while there are many examples in the Bible of barren and/or aged women falling pregnant and giving birth by means of a miraculous intervention by God, none of these is specified as a virgin birth. Only to Mary is imputed this singular miracle: that she conceives and bears a child without male intervention or sexual intercourse, and that she remains a virgin *post partum,* her

physical ‘integrity’ (i.e. her intact hymen, understood as the physical indication of virginity) in no way damaged by the physical birth of Jesus.

3. Mary’s grief and suffering, intimately connected with the life and mission of her Son. A sufficient number of Gospel passages propose the hardship, grief and suffering of Mary’s life: primary is the dire prophecy of Simeon about the sword that would pierce her soul,[1] but no less telling are the flight into Egypt[2] and the whole Calvary event where she shares intensely in the sufferings of Jesus.[3] Other events from which her sorrows may be deduced are the physical difficulties surrounding Jesus’ birth, the massacre of the children in an attempt to kill Jesus, the loss of the child Jesus for a period of three days in Jerusalem and the threats against his life. It is precisely beneath the cross that Mary’s sorrows, spread throughout her life, reach their climax as, standing beneath her tortured and dying Son, she offers her suffering as a participation in the redemptive act.

4. Most important in the context of this paper, is the issue of Mary’s intercessory prerogatives in heaven on behalf of the people of God:

> “Taken up into heaven, she…by her manifold intercession continues to procure for us the gifts of eternal salvation. Therefore the blessed Virgin is invoked in the church under the titles of advocate, helper, benefactress and mediatrix. This, however, is understood in such a way that it neither takes away anything from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator.”[4]

This paragraph from the document *Lumen Gentium* contains two important Marian teachings: the first, is that Mary has been taken up (or ‘entered’, to use the word common to the Fâtima narratives) into heaven in a singular manner, and the second is that there, she assists the Church and its members by her intercession, with a power that Pope Leo XIII (d. 1903) described as “greater than any man or angel has ever attained or could attain.”[5]

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[1] Lk. 2: 34-35.

[2] Mt. 2: 13-21.

[3] Jn. 19: 17-42.

[4] *Lumen Gentium* 62, in FLANNERY A. (ed.)., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Dominican Publications, Dublin 1975.

[5] LEO XIII., Encyclical Letter *Supremi Apostolatus*, 1883.

Mary's reception into Paradise bears investigation, for its documentation falls into the realm both of dogma and that of popular piety. So for example, in the words of one Spanish mystic, she was:

> "…elevated to the right hand of her Son and the true God, and situated at the same royal throne of the Most Blessed Trinity, whither neither men nor angels nor seraphs have before attained, nor will ever attain for all eternity. This is the highest and the most excellent privilege of our Queen and Lady…"[1]

From the dogmatic point of view, it was in 1950 that Pope Pius XII, in consultation with bishops throughout the world, solemnly declared in his Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* that:

> "Mary, the immaculate perpetually Virgin Mother of God, after the completion of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into the glory of heaven."

This teaching, a truth defined by a solemn judgment of faith and which must be believed with full assent, was no innovation: almost a decade earlier the same Pontiff had written of "Mary, resplendent in glory in body and soul"[2] reigning with her Son in heaven. Like the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, this belief underwent a long and slow development. Although no direct proofs are to be found in the Scriptures, the medieval theologians derived this doctrine, as they did the Immaculate Conception, from the fullness of Mary's purity and holiness: full of grace, she was logically preserved from the threefold curse of sin (Gen. 3: 16-19), one of which is the return to dust. The Fathers of the Church looked to passages about the incorruptible wood of the Ark of the Covenant (identified with Mary) such as Rev. 11: 19, in which the Ark is seen in God's heavenly temple. The Fathers and the later theologians accentuated four foundations for this teaching: Mary's sinlessness, her Divine motherhood, her perpetual virginity and her participation in the work of her Son. Wrote St. Gregory of Tours (d. 594):

> "But Mary, the glorious Mother of Christ, who is believed to be a virgin both before and after she bore Him, has, as we said above, been translated

[1] María de Agreda, quoted in PELIKAN J., *Mary Through the Centuries*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1996: 204.

[2] PIUS XII., *Mystici Corporis*, (n.d.), n. 110: 66.

> into paradise, amid the singing of the angelic choirs, whither the Lord has preceded her."[1]

Two hundred or so years after St. Gregory, St. John Damascene offered a more fulsome account:

> "…but we have received from ancient and most truthful tradition that at the time of her glorious repose, all the Holy Apostles, who were then dispersed abroad in the world for the salvation of the nations, were in but a moment of time transported through the air to Jerusalem; and when they were there an angelic vision appeared to them, and the divine chanting of the supernal powers was heard. And thus in divine and heavenly glory her holy soul was delivered in a way that no word can describe, into the hands of God…the chanting and choral singing of the angels continued without cease for three days."[2]

Historically, the dogma was both supported and rejected by a number of anonymous or falsely attributed tracts, and was the subject of numerous theological arguments. Pope Benedict XIV (d. 1758) declared it to be "a pious and probable opinion",[3] but 1849 saw the first petitions for its formal declaration begin arriving in Rome. The position of Mary in Paradise is one of incomparable glory: raised above all the angels and saints, she reigns as Queen, as a direct consequence of her Divine motherhood and intrinsic connection with her Son's redemptive work. It is this sublime dignity, notes one author, which makes her so powerful in her intercessory prerogatives.[4]

The intercessory role of Mary is clearly evident in the New Testament, in the account of the wedding at Cana,[5] where by her intercession she initiated the first of her Son's signs recorded by John, and in her prayerful presence in the early Church, especially with the Apostles before the day of Pentecost. Having been assumed into heaven and clothed in unsurpassed glory as Queen, far from putting aside this mediatory role, she continues to exercise a mission of intercession for the salvation of all her children. Her prayer is far inferior to that of her Son, but more powerful than that of all the angels and saints: for while there remains only one Mediator between God and humankind – Jesus Christ[6] – the Church insists that

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[1] JURGENS W.A., *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, 1970-1979, vol. III, n. 2288b: 306.

[2] JURGENS W.A., *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, 1970-1979, vol. III, n. 2390: 350.

[3] OTT L., *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 1960, Book III, Part 3, ch. 2, n. 6: 210.

[4] Ibid.: 211.

[5] Jn. 2: 1-10.

[6] Cf. 1 Timothy 2: 5-6.

> "Mary's function as mother of humankind in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ…it flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation, depends entirely upon it and draws all its power from it."[1]

Faith in her intercessory power is expressed from earliest Christian times – the Fathers used the word *mediatrix* ('go-between'), a word much used in Church documents – and is found articulated, for example, in the first extant prayer to Mary, the Greek text of the 3RD century prayer *Sub tuum praesidium*:

> "We fly to Thy patronage, O Virgin of virgins our Mother. Despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin."[2]

The theological nature of Mary's intercession is that she "co-operates in the application in the grace of Redemption to man."[3] As one author notes:

> "In view of her unique role in saving history Mary is revered as Mediatrix of all graces – not productive mediation, like Jesus Christ's, but a receptive one of merit and intercession and, as Vatican II said, wholly dependent upon the mediation of Christ – because those who have attained salvation through the final achievement of their perfected lives intercede with God for the company of the saints on earth."[4]

Both in her theology and in her piety, the Catholic Church employs the word 'advocate' to portray Mary's intercession, as she pleads the cause of humanity before the throne of God. At times, this intercessory status has been expressed in strong language: St. Germanus of Constantinople (d. c. 733) wrote:

> "No one is saved except through you, O All-Holy. No one is delivered from evils except through you, O All-Chaste. No one obtains the grace of mercy except through you, O All-Honorable…For, just as in your Son's presence you have a mother's boldness and strength, do you with your prayers and

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[1] *Lumen Gentium* 60 in FLANNERY A. (ed.)., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Dominican Publications, Dublin 1975.

[2] The prayer has been traced back to 3RD century Egypt, and is extant in Greek on papyrus, in the John Rylands Library, Manchester.

[3] OTT L., *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 1960, Book III, Part 3, ch. 3, n. 6: 213.

[4] RAHNER K. and VORGRIMLER H., *Concise Theological Dictionary*, 2ND edn., Burns and Oates, London 1983: 295.

> intercessions save and rescue us from eternal punishment, for we have been condemned by our sins and do not even dare even to lift our eyes to heaven above."[1]

The pious legends and stories of Mary's intercessory powers comprise a number of genres. The first, which flowered in the Middle Ages, but strands of which are still found in parts of Europe, is that through Mary's prayers, infertility and barrenness is defeated and women can bear children. Extant examples of this tradition are found in a number of Marian shrines famous for this aspect of Mary as mother and 'midwife' (a key role of the Qur'anic Maryam in the life of Fâtima) – the 'Black Madonna' of Montserrat, shrines in Chartres, Rome, Milan, Naples and Sicily (where in the frescoes and paintings, Mary is often portrayed with pomegranates or corn, symbols of fertility). Close to this theme is that of Mary miraculously providing dowers for poor and orphan girls: a classic example is the altarpiece in the church of *Santa Maria Sopra Minerva* in Rome. In terms of relics of Our Lady, the sash she wore around her waist (and described by various visionaries) became particularly associated with her power to give the gift of fertility (according to a legend from the Middle Ages, this sash fell into the hands of Thomas the Apostle, an event represented in medieval art found in England, Italy and the ex-Yugoslavia). There are numerous pious legends of Mary intervening, either to provide a child for an infertile devotee, or even to spirit away a child from one who ought not to be pregnant.

A second genre is that of Mary interceding for and intervening in great and small events through the prayers and pleas of needy supplicants. "She mediates between heaven and earth, for in her glorified body she belongs in both realms. She listen to the implorations of mankind, 'groaning and weeping in this vale of tears' – as the *Salve Regina* sings – and promises to ease their pain with heavenly medicine."[2] As noted before, in theological terms, Mary's intercession depends upon and is a share in the intercession of her Son, the only mediator between God and humankind. But in popular piety, Mary has unconstrained power. Primarily, she is approached as a mother who will be refused nothing by her Son, whom she asks on behalf of her devotees. Such a theme resonates in the most famous prayers to Mary: the 3RD century *Sub tuum praesidium*, and the 11TH century *Salve Regina* and *Alma Redemptoris Mater*. In addition to countless mundane favours, Mary has been petitioned in moments of serious historical crisis: so it is that, by her intercession and intervention, the Turks were held to have been defeated by Christian forces at the Battle of Lepanto (1571), and again at Petrovaradin (1717). No less so was the fall of Communism in the late 20TH century ascribed, at least in part, to

[1] GAMBERO L., *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 1999: 387-288.

[2] Cf. WARNER M., *Alone Of All Her Sex. The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 1985: 285.

Mary's prayers. The major Marian shrines highlight yet another important intervention believed to be part of Mary's intercessory prerogatives: the healing of bodily illness and infirmity. In Lourdes (France) and Fatima (Portugal), innumerable pilgrims pray for a cure. (It is a point of note that there are groups within Catholicism who maintain that Mary appeared at a place called Fatima precisely because Muslims ought to be converted to Christianity: and groups within Islam who hold that her appearance there was to uphold the truth of Muhammad by honouring his daughter. Neither of these viewpoints appears to be worthy of much consideration).

A third genre is Mary's intercession for the dying, specifically that they might enter heaven. It is here most particularly that we find elements strongly resonant in the Shîʿî theology constructed around Fâtima, although the theological differences remain stark. The same Virgin Mary whose powerful prayers can bring fertility, cures from various ills and consolation to those who pray to her, has a more important function within the theology of her intercession: to plead for the salvation of sinners at the throne of God. As noted in this chapter, the repentance of the individual concerned plays a key role in this mediation.[1]

There are, of course, palpable congruencies between Mary and Fatima: a considerable element is the angelic activity constructed around the conceptions and births of Jesus and al-Husayn, the heavenly annunciations, the forewarnings (for Fâtima before the birth and for Mary after it) before as well as the cosmic rejoicing when the births occur. Both Mary and Fâtima gave birth under testing circumstances, to sons who will be killed, and regarded, each in his own unique way, as a martyr and over whom their mothers will grieve. The salient dissimilarity between the two women is that, while Mary witnesses the arrest, trial, torture and execution of her Son, Fâtima does not: she had been dead for almost fifty years. Nonetheless, there is conceivably no area in which the theologies constructed around the Mary of Catholicism and the Fâtima of Islam are more cohesive than in that of grief and lament.

What concerns us most of all are the prerogative of intercession. While the correspondence between the intercession of Mary and that of Fâtima may appear conspicuous, there are a number of important differences to be born in mind. Of its very nature, Mary's intercession depends on two factors: the merits of her Son's redemptive act, and the all-important theme of human repentance. While there may be legends and stories in popular piety about Mary rescuing people from Hell, these do not form part of the teaching of the Church. Her intercessory powers may be powerful,

[1] Ibid.,: 273-331.

but they remain secondary to the mediation of her Son. But even in the legends, which tell of Mary intervening in various human situations – and St. Gregory of Tours for example collates countless such stories in his *Libri Miraculorum* – repentance on the part of the individual remains a key factor for salvation.

According to the Shîᶜî texts we have examined, Fâtima's intercessory prerogatives are a result of her own great sufferings and, primarily, as a result of her membership of the 'people of the house'. Her intercession extends to her adherents, to those who loved and, in varied ways, supported her (even non-Shîᶜa) and to her progeny. Strictly speaking, although Islam is not without a theology of sin and repentance, repentance does not play a major role in the intercessory role of Fâtima: this partly due to the stark differences in the understanding of sin and repentance in Islam and Christianity.[1] The texts demarcate certain groupings that benefit from her prayers: her adherents, progeny and those who love her. These can win a place in Paradise chiefly because Fâtima asks it for them: the theme of their own repentance from sin hardly appears in the texts we have examined. Notwithstanding the strict Qur'anic injunctions, which insist that no one intercedes except by the will and permission of God, Fâtima is given an

[1] Cf. LAGARDE M., "Sin, Repentance and Forgiveness in the Qur'an and Tradition" in *Encounter*, n. 107, July-August 1984. Qur'anic language moves in two major directions as it attempts to articulate the cycle of sin, repentance and forgiveness: the first is the idea of order and disorder, while the second offers imagery of the veil and unveiled. For sin in general, the Qur'ân uses various key terms, each of which, in some way, suggests order and disorder: situating something outside of its proper sphere, resisting the effort to bring good order, situating oneself outside of the customary or legal order of things, the separating of something that was part of a whole, or the idea of leaving the original position. Other terms used for particular sin, and these too suggest movement from order to disorder, from regularity to irregularity, from harmony to disharmony. Concomitantly, the concept of repentance is expressed by the terms *tawba* and *nadâma*: both suggest a movement back from disharmony to harmony, from chaos to order. At a second level we find words referring to sin and forgiveness and which convey the sense of the veiled and the unveiled – hiding faith by sin or disguising the truth, as opposed to God's forgiveness which could be understood as a covering of sin and a veiling of punishment. Since in Islam there exists no concept of 'original sin', the theology of salvation and redemption (in the Christian sense) has no meaning: sin in Islam is understood as wronging oneself, and so does not touch precisely one's relationships with others or even, to some extent, with God. For Christianity, sin is an act which separates one from God to a greater or lesser extent, for by its very nature is it a negation of God's will, law and covenant relationship of love. All sin springs from the Original Sin of Adam: both 'original sin', the state of being deprived of supernatural life, with all its effects, and in which every human is born, and 'actual sin', committed, in the final analysis through choice, by the human being. Only God can forgive sin: and God made man in Christ gives the Church the power to transmit His forgiveness. Repentance remains the chief characteristic in this: it means a rejection of sin, a turning from sinful behaviour and a return to God. In this, as in the Islamic concept examined above, there is a movement from one state to another (expressed precisely in Catholic theology by the Greek *metanoia*).

extraordinary liberty in her intercessory role. This is patently clear in one of the texts already examined:

> "…God has made you judge over His creation. Whoever harmed you and harmed your offspring, judge them as you wish, and I will sanction your judgment concerning them…"[1]

The texts also demarcate the various grades of her intercession: passive, merely because she is a member of the 'people of the house', with a status and name so potent that it is incumbent upon God to answer the prayers of the prophets and holy ones who use it:[2] and active, by the will and permission of God: negative, in terms of which she asks punishment for the killers of her son: and positive, in terms of which she leads her progeny, loved ones and supporters (including a number of women) into Paradise. Love for Fâtima is primary, as seen in a Tradition, which is remarkable close to some of the Gospel passages:[3]

> "Abû Jaᶜfar said: By God, on that day she will pick out her adherents and those who love her the way a bird picks out the good seed from the perishable. When her Shîᶜa come with her to the gate of Paradise, God will direct their hearts to turn around, and when they turn around, God, powerful and lofty, will say: My beloved ones, why did you look around when Fâtima, the daughter of My beloved one, has interceded for you? They will answer: Lord! We would have liked our standing to be known on a day like this. God will say: My beloved ones, go back and look for anyone who loved you for the love of Fâtima. Look for anyone who fed you for the love of Fâtima. Look for anyone who clothed you for the love of Fâtima. Look for anyone who gave you a drink for the love of Fâtima.

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[1] Al-Qummî., *Kâmil al-ziyârât*, n. 10: 334.

[2] Notably, the prayer of Iblîs in the name of Fâtima is not answered, and he remains unredeemed.

[3] Specifically, the great judgment scene described in the parable of Mt. 25: 31-46. In terms of the parable, salvation depends on particular works of goodness: "*Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to see me*." When the recipients of this joyous news query the actual circumstances in which such good actions were performed, they are told by the King: "*Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me*." In a similar strand of thought, Jesus says that "*whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward*" (Mt. 10: 42). In Mark's version it is "*because you bear the name of Christ*" (Mk. 9: 41).

> Look for everyone who prevented slander against you for the love of Fâtima. Take him by his hand and lead him into Paradise." [1]

In the final analysis, and in spite of elements, which, at first glance, appear to be strikingly similar, there are clear and major contrasts in the theologies constructed around these women by their adherents. Aside from the status of sorrowful mother, which certainly unites them (and countless other mothers throughout the course of history), they follow diverse paths. The virginity claimed for both of them is, although in both cases something essentially physical, not the same kind of virginity. The claims made about their respective sons very dissimilar. Their manner of intercession, although in both cases done only because God permits it, is disparate. Their personal histories are different.

Without blurring the arrant inimitability of each, the words of Pope Paul VI about Mary might no less be applied, at least in some of its aspects, to Fâtima:

> "The modern woman will note with pleasant surprise that Mary of Nazareth, while completely devoted to the will of God, was far from being a timidly submissive woman or one whose piety was repellent to others; on the contrary, she was a woman who did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and the oppressed, and removes the powerful people of this world from their privileged positions. The modern woman will recognize in Mary, who 'stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord,' a woman of strength, who experienced poverty and suffering, flight and exile…the figure of the Blessed Virgin does not disillusion any of the profound expectations of the men and women of our time but offers them the perfect model of the disciple of the Lord: the disciple who builds up the earthly and temporal city while being a diligent pilgrim towards the heavenly and eternal city; the disciple who works for that justice which sets free the oppressed and for that charity which assists the needy…"[2]

A more contemporary reinterpretation of Mary reads:

> "Mary is the woman butchered in Rwanda, the Muslim woman raped and brutalized and left pregnant by soldiers, the single mother on welfare, working at subsistence wages, raising her children without help from the

[1] Al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr*, vol. VIII, bb. 21, n. 59: 51, vol. XLIII, bb. 3, n. 57: 64-65.

[2] Pope Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, 1974, 37.

> church or community or her ex-husband. She is all the women, one third of the world's population always on the move, fleeing from starvation, war, and disasters of flood, earthquake, and draught. She is the woman who mourns the slaughter of the children, the executions of the state, the torture and disappearances of men and women. She is the shadow of the old ones battered or shunted aside, institutionalized or left on the streets to wander and scavenge for a living…She is the one who belongs to those who have no one else. She is the one who mourns injustice, violence, insensitivity, and selfishness. She is both victim and advocate. She is singer and crier for an end to evils and unnecessary hurt."[1]

In similar vein, French-educated sociologist ᶜAli Shariati (d. 1977), writes of Fâtima:

> "Fatima acts as a halo for the visages of all the oppressed who later became the multitudes of Islam. All of the usurped, extorted, oppressed sufferers, all of those whose rights have been destroyed and sacrificed by pressure and force, and have been deceived had the name Fatima for a slogan. The memory of Fatima grew with the love, emotions and wonderful faith of men and women who throughout the history of Islam fought for freedom and justice…she inspires the seekers of justice, the resisters of oppression, cruelty, crime and discrimination. Fatima is the woman that Islam wants a woman to be."[2]

The following text represents an example of the prayer, in litany-like form, commonly associated with a pilgrimage to a place associated with Fâtima. As a prayer, it serves to highlight some of her titles (and some of those of her father), as well as to underscore some of the theology constructed around her:

> Peace be upon you O daughter of the Messenger of God:
> Peace be upon you O daughter of the Prophet of God:
> Peace be upon you O daughter of the beloved of God:
> Peace be upon you O daughter of the friend of God:
> Peace be upon you O daughter of the sincere friend of God:
> Peace be upon you O daughter of the trusted one of God:
> Peace be upon you O daughter of the best of God's creatures:
> Peace be upon you O daughter of the most excellent of God's prophets, messengers and angels:

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[1] McKENNA M., *Mary, Shadow of Grace*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1995: 4.

[2] SHARIATI A., *Red Shi'ism*, The Shariati Foundation, Tehran 1979: 4.

> Peace be upon you O daughter of the best of all created ones:
> Peace be upon you O mistress of the women of the worlds from first to last:
> Peace be upon you O wife of the holy one of God and the best of creatures after the Messenger of God:
> Peace be upon you O Mother of al-Hasan and al-Husayn, the masters of the youths of the people of Paradise:
> Peace be upon you O righteous one and martyr:
> Peace be upon you O satisfied one, and she who satisfies God:
> Peace be upon you O outstanding and pure one:
> Peace be upon you O maiden of Paradise in human form:
> Peace be upon you O pious and pure one:
> Peace be upon you O converser with angels, and knowledgeable one:
> Peace be upon you O tyrannized and usurped one:
> Peace be upon you O oppressed and subjugated one:
> Peace be upon you O Fâtima, daughter of the Messenger of God, and the mercy of God and His blessings. May God bless you, your spirit and your body.
> I bear witness that you died fully aware of your Lord: and that the one who gladdens you, has gladdened the Messenger of God, and the one who turns from you has turned from the Messenger of God, and the one who harms you, has harmed the messenger of God, the one who unites himself to you has united himself to the Messenger of God, the one who snubs you has snubbed the Messenger of God. Because you are a part of him, and his spirit which is between his two loins." [1]

Prayers to Mary, in similar litanies, are found scattered throughout the writings of the Fathers of the Church and the saints of various ages. Possibly the most famous and profound of these Marian prayers is the Greek liturgical hymn, of unknown authorship but dating to the late 5TH or early 6TH century, and known as the *Akáthistos*.[2] The hymn is too long to reproduce in full: every strophe provides a name applied to Mary, each suggestive of a particular theology. A later, and much simpler example of such a prayer, is the Celtic litany attributed to St. Brogan. This litany too, attributes theologically rich titles to Mary:

> "O great Mary, O Mary, greatest of Mary's, O greatest of women, Holy Mother of God, Mother of Christ, Mother of Divine grace, Mother most

[1] Al-Majlisî., *Bihâr al-anwâr,* vol. XCVII, bb. 5, n. 12: 195, 199.

[2] The word means 'not seated', meaning that the hymn, an alphabetical acrostic, ought to be sung standing in honour of Mary.

pure, Mother most chaste, Mother undefiled, Mother most amiable, Mother most admirable, Mother of good counsel, Mother of Christ our Creator, Mother of our Saviour, Mother most worthy, Mother more spacious than the heavens, Mother of consolation, Mother of eternal glory, Mother of the heavenly and earthly Church, Mother of fondness and forgiveness, Mother of the golden Light, Lady of the heavens, Lady of the families of the earth, O Woman full and replete with the grace of the Holy Spirit, True beauty of women, Virgin most prudent, most venerable and faithful, Virgin most powerful, most merciful and renowned, Beauty of virgins, Chief of the maidens, Mirror of justice, Seat of wisdom, Cause of our joy, Joy of all who sorrow, O cleansing of sins, O renewal of life, Spiritual vessel, Vessel of honour, Singular vessel of devotion, Holy grail, Mystical rose, Enclosed garden, Burning bush, Fountain of the gardens, Tower of David, Palace of ivory, House of gold, Ark of the Covenant, Gate of heaven, Temple of the Divinity, Throne of the Eternal King, Sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, Keeper of the portal, Ladder of heaven, Virgin of the root of Jesse, Cedar of Mount Lebanon, Cyprus of Mount Sion, Purple rose of the land of Israel, O flowering like a palm, O fruitful like the olive tree, Light of Nazareth, Glory of Jerusalem, Glory of the world, Noblest born of the Christian flock, Morning star, Star of the sea, Health of the sick, Refuge of sinners, Model of saints, Searcher of the lost, Comforter of the afflicted, Breast of the infants, Solace of the wretched, Mother of the motherless, Mother of the unloved, Help of Christians, Terror of demons, Unexpected joy, Sign of tranquility, O shapely like a dove, O serene like the moon, O resplendent like the sun, O quick to hear, Queen of angels, Queen of all saints, Queen of peace, Handmaiden of God, Daughter of God the Father, Mother of God the Son, Spouse of God the Holy Spirit, O blessed and most blessed."

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